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1 – Dope Deal: Wall Street Journal Falls for Methane “Facts” Cooked by Industry, Environmental Defense Fund, 1/6/2015

<http://blogs.edf.org/energyexchange/2015/01/06/dope-deal-wall-street-journal-falls-for-methane-facts-cooked-by-industry/>

When credibility is your stock in trade, it's important to have your facts straight. On Monday, the Wall Street Journal blew it. In an unsigned opinion piece dubbed “Meth Heads in the White House,” the paper dismisses plans expected to be announced by the Obama administration in the next few weeks that would start to tackle the huge amount of methane leaking from America's oil & gas production facilities.

2 – Builder helps make geothermal standard in Oklahoma city neighborhoods, Contractor, 1/6/2015

<http://contractormag.com/geothermal/builder-helps-make-geothermal-standard-oklahoma-city-neighborhoods>

When it comes to hearing “it just can't be done,” Oklahoma City-based Ideal Homes couldn't be more welcoming of the challenge. Specializing in energy-efficient homes priced under \$200,000, Ideal Homes has been racking up a long list of industry firsts for nearly two decades. Among other notable achievements, this list includes being the first builder recognized by the EPA as a “5-Star” Energy Builder for Homes Under \$150,000 (in 1997), and being the first in the U.S. to build a “Zero Energy Home” priced under \$200,000.

3 – Fort Smith Residents Speak Out Against Sewer Rate Hikes, Times Record, 1/7/2015

<http://swtimes.com/news/fort-smith-residents-speak-out-against-sewer-rate-hikes#sthash.lcNFoNvP.dpuf>

Residents opposed to looming sewer-rate hikes in Fort Smith expressed their frustrations to city leaders Tuesday night. “Why didn't we address this 15-20 years ago about this sewer that's going on instead of just knocking folks' socks off right now?” resident Edward McCurtain asked city leaders during a Town Hall forum. “We should have done that a long time ago.”

4 – EPA settlement will not change rates for Fort Smith wholesale water users, City Wire, 1/6/2015

<http://www.thecitywire.com/node/35989#.VK1JDCvF9Cg>

Van Buren and other wholesale water customers of the Fort Smith water system will not see their rates change to help pay for the estimated \$480 million Fort Smith will have to invest by 2026 as part of an agreement with the federal government.

5 – TCEQ to hear from stakeholders over LCRA water plan, Burnet Bulletin, 1/7/2015

<http://www.burnetbulletin.com/articles/2015/01/07/tceq-hear-stakeholders-over-lcra-water-plan>

One of the top priorities for stakeholders in the Colorado River's upper basin is to ensure the establishment of an updated plan that better protects the Highland Lakes water supply which is vital to much of Central Texas. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) currently is considering the Lower Colorado River Authority's (LCRA) proposed update to its plan that was last changed in 2010.

6 – McAllen Resident Worries about Fracking, KRGV, 1/6/2015

<http://www.krgv.com/news/local-news/McAllen-Resident-Worries-about-Fracking/30564996>

A McAllen resident is worried that fracking activity near his home may damage the apartment complex where he lives. Jose Reyes lives near the OXY USA McAllen location. The Houston-based company is using fracking to get natural gas. Reyes said the drilling has caused his apartment to shake. He moved into the complex six years ago.

7 – NM's first 'toilet to tap' project years overdue and millions over budget, New Mexico Watch Dog, 1/7/2015

<http://watchdog.org/191087/wastewater-over-budget/>

After having to truck in fresh water to make it through tourist season during a drought in the early days of the 21st century, the village of Cloudcroft turned to a novel idea — spend \$2.3 million to recycle wastewater for household use. But the cost of the project has since swelled to nearly \$6 million, according to a Legislative Finance Committee report, and is likely to go higher.

8 Nine tremors jolt North Texas in less than 24 hours, WFAA, 1/7/2015

<http://www.wfaa.com/story/news/local/dallas-county/2015/01/06/irving-earthquake-north-texas/21352091/>

Nine earthquakes centered near the old Texas Stadium site in Irving jolted North Texans on Tuesday and into the early hours of Wednesday. The largest of the quakes — 3.5 and 3.6 magnitude — were felt by thousands across dozens of cities. There were no reports of injuries or serious damage, although some residents worried about the potential impact on their homes.

9 – Study links Ohio earthquakes to Houston company's wells, Fuel Fix, 1/6/2015

<http://fuelfix.com/blog/2015/01/06/study-links-ohio-earthquakes-to-houston-companys-wells/>

Earthquakes that shook an Ohio town last year are linked to hydraulic fracturing, according to a study published in a scientific journal Tuesday. In March 2014, five recorded earthquakes of 2.1 to 3.0 magnitude happened within 0.6 miles of a group of oil and gas wells in Poland Township, Ohio operated by Houston-based Hilcorp Energy, which was conducting fracturing operations at the time, the study said.

10 – BLM postpones oil and gas lease sale, Beaumont Enterprise, 1/7/2015

<http://www.beaumontenterprise.com/business/energy/article/BLM-postpones-oil-and-gas-lease-sale-5998761.php>

The Bureau of Land Management has postponed an oil and gas lease sale for a handful of parcels in northwestern New Mexico, saying more time is needed to review public comments. Environmentalists contend the leases would have opened the door for hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, before the agency updates its management plan.

11 – (Opinion) Webber: It's time for Republicans to pass carbon tax, Houston Chron, 1/6/2015

<http://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Webber-It-s-time-for-Republicans-to-pass-carbon-5997549.php>

As Republicans prepare to take over Congress, they should take a page from Bill Clinton's playbook, demonstrate their ability to govern and seize the moment to do something great for the country: pass a carbon tax. Several prominent conservatives have advocated for a carbon tax, but generally speaking, both taxes and carbon regulation are unpopular with Republicans.

12 - Oil group CEO: Amid price drop, US set to be global leader, Odessa America, 1/6/2015

http://www.oaoa.com/news/government/article_27f106c0-68d4-5e42-8489-572c88e159ca.html

Plunging oil prices have hurt American companies in the short run, but increased U.S. production means that the country is on the path to become a global leader in oil production, the head of the U.S. oil and gas industry's top lobbying arm said Tuesday. Falling oil prices have empowered the United States and weakened OPEC and Russia, said Jack Gerard, the CEO of the American Petroleum Institute.

13 - Honeywell's Baton Rouge plant begins producing low-global-warming-potential material, NOLA.com, 1/6/2015

http://www.nola.com/business/baton-rouge/index.ssf/2015/01/honeywells_baton_rouge_plant_b.html

Honeywell announced Tuesday (Jan. 6) it's started full-scale commercial production of a low-global-warming-potential (GWP) material used as an aerosol propellant, insulating agent and refrigerant at its Flourine Products Baton Rouge production facility.

14 - In West Texas, protest aims to stop fracking sand depot, Houston Chron, 1/2/2015

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/energy/article/In-West-Texas-protest-aims-to-stop-fracking-sand-5990189.php#/0>

From a high floor of the Cactus Hotel, which he owns, Addison Lee Pfluger has a fine view over the historic downtown, much of which he also owns. Across the Concho River, where he treats the townspeople to a Christmas light display, his vantage extends unimpeded to the cotton fields and goat herds and oil pumpjacks of the vast ranches, several of which he owns as well. At 73, with neatly parted hair as golden as his wristwatch, Pfluger has assembled a local business empire matched only by his own achievements in community service, which include urban restoration, patronage of the arts and financing for charitable organizations.

15- Heavyweight Response to Local Fracking Bans, NY Times, 1/3/2015

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/us/heavyweight-response-to-local-fracking-bans.html?_r=0

This northern Colorado city vaulted onto the front lines of the battle over oil and gas drilling two years ago, when residents voted to ban hydraulic fracturing from their grassy open spaces and a snow-fed reservoir where anglers catch smallmouth bass.

16- Anti-fracking leaders from Denton, Texas, to make appearances in St. Tammany Parish, Times Picayune, 1/6/2015

http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2015/01/denton_texas_fracking_opponent.html#incart_river

Two people whose efforts helped enact a ban on fracking in Denton, Texas, will be in St. Tammany Parish this weekend for a party and a symposium about hydraulic fracturing. The citizens group Tammany Together is putting on the events.

17- La. tribe sinks amid struggle for compensation, Greenwire, 1/6/2015

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2015/01/06/stories/1060011184>

The land that is home to a Louisiana American Indian tribe is disappearing beneath the Gulf of Mexico as the United Houma Nation struggles for any sort of recognition. Leaders of the 17,000-member tribe say the problem of gradually sinking wetlands was made significantly worse by the 2010 BP PLC oil spill.

18- As Louisiana's marshes erode, so does the Houma Indians way of life, Al Jazeera America, 1/5/15

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/5/louisiana-wetlandsenvironmentclimatechange.html>

Streams of oil slid into the bayous of southeastern Louisiana after the Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010, damaging the marsh grasses, the wildlife and the livelihood of the 17,000-member Houma tribe. The pollution also weakened the marshes, accelerating the rapid disappearance of coastal land that is taking the Houma Indians' culture with it.

19- Forest Service yanks plan to spend millions on public relations campaign to better its image, 1/7/15

<http://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2015/01/07/forest-service-yanks-10-million-contract-to-boost-its-image>

Faced with a backlash from employees and retirees, the U.S. Forest Service has abruptly dropped plans to spend up to \$10 million on a five-year nationwide public relations campaign to brand itself as a public agency that cares about people and nature. Without giving any reason why, the Forest Service issued a statement Tuesday saying that it had not accepted any contract bids and would look for other ways to enhance the public's access to national forests and understanding about what the agency does. Spokesman Larry Chambers would not answer questions.

Dope Deal: Wall Street Journal Falls for Methane “Facts” Cooked by Industry

By [MARK BROWNSTEIN](#) | [BIO](#) | Published: JANUARY 6, 2015

When credibility is your stock in trade, it's important to have your facts straight. On Monday, the Wall Street Journal blew it.

In an unsigned opinion piece dubbed “[Meth Heads in the White House](#),” the paper dismisses plans expected to be announced by the Obama administration in the next few weeks that would start to tackle the huge amount of methane leaking from America's oil & gas production facilities.

The question is a significant one, because – as the article notes in passing – methane is an extremely potent greenhouse gas (in point of fact, packing more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over a 20 year time frame). According to EPA data, oil & gas operations emit roughly 8 million metric tons of unburned methane annually, enough gas to heat nearly 6 million homes.

While acknowledging the problem, the Journal argues that companies are solving it just fine on their own, citing figures which closely track industry talking points suggesting that emissions are already dropping. Unfortunately, the numbers in question are a blend of half-baked, fully cooked and – in one key instance – flat out wrong.

In their most glaring error, Journal editors cite [a University of Texas Study](#) published last month (and partly funded by EDF) to claim that oil & gas industry methane emissions have fallen 10 percent between 2013 and 2014 alone. In fact, as study author David Allen has pointed out, the results, which actually come from two different UT studies, fall squarely within the margin of error and hence show no such change in emission rates.

In other words: No, the UT study does not say what the Journal editors say it says. The paper owes its readers a correction.

As to the idea that methane emissions from oil and gas operations have fallen steadily over time, this too is simply false. In reality, oil & gas industry methane emissions as estimated by the EPA stayed relatively flat between 1990 and 2008, and didn't begin to decline noticeably until 2009. While part of that was the result of smarter practices by select operators, the bigger driver of the reported decline has been 2012 EPA rules limiting natural gas emissions from an important part of the drilling process known as “well completions.”

We'd say those gains are proof-positive that sound regulation gets results.

Reported declines after 2009 also completely ignore oil well emissions, which account for a substantial share of sector's total methane footprint. (Part of the reduction also stems from changes in how EPA does its math.)

Even *those* numbers don't paint the whole picture.

Although EPA Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program data shows the industry's total methane emissions fell 12 percent between 2011 and 2013, emissions from key activities not currently covered by federal standards went up substantially.

According to the very same UT study cited affectionately by the Journal, average emissions from thousands of pneumatic controllers used to operate valves throughout the supply chain are 17 percent higher than EPA estimates, due to a mixture of both unintended malfunctions and deliberately leaky design. Moreover, UT researchers say real-world emissions from these devices may be twice as high as EPA figures due to systematic undercounting by the agency.

Two other recent national studies not mentioned in the article – but available [here](#) and [here](#) – suggest EPA's overall estimates of methane emissions from the oil & gas industry are too low by half, based on actual methane emissions measured by scientists.

The good news, [firmly underscored by the UT study](#), is that a relatively small share of wells and equipment are responsible for a disproportionate piece of the emissions pie. The trick is finding which ones are performing badly, and when. And that is precisely why we need tougher rules and regulations. Once we know where the problems are, it is a relatively simple, cost-effective matter to start plugging the leaks.

Could industry police itself, as the Journal suggests? The evidence suggests otherwise. The biggest voluntary program for reducing industry methane emissions, EPA's Natural Gas Star, has been around since 1993, but of the more than 6,000 producers in operation, fewer than 30 are participants.

Fortunately, the economics favor action. Cutting current methane emissions in half by requiring leak detection and repair and other sensible measures, would save the oil & gas industry nearly \$1 billion a year in wasted product and cut the 20-year climate pollution equivalent of 90 coal-fired power plants.

Penciling out the math even farther, a study by ICF recently estimated that companies could cut methane emissions by 40 percent or more for about *one quarter of one percent* of the price of the gas they're selling. That means \$4.00 worth of gas would cost \$4.01 – an affordable bargain even at a time of falling prices.

In short, the Wall Street Journal has the facts backward. When you get the numbers straight, it's easy to see how the methane problem is also a huge, low-cost opportunity to help address the climate challenge, and to recognize that sensible regulation can set a level playing field for all oil and gas operators, not just the few who choose to do the right thing.



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- Ideal Homes brings energy efficiency to first-time home buyers.
- Instead of having to "sell" geothermal, geothermal helps sell Ideal Homes properties.
- The builder's approach to selling the benefits of geothermal in these homes is straightforward.
- Ideal Homes has tailored the efficiency message to potential homebuyers.

OKLAHOMA CITY — When it comes to hearing "it just can't be done," Oklahoma City-based [Ideal Homes](#) couldn't be more welcoming of the challenge.

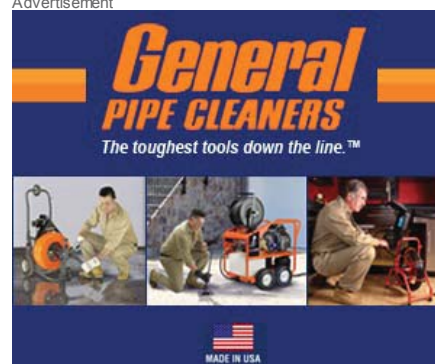


Titian Burris, pictured here, worked for several years with both Caddo Electric and Ideal Homes to help facilitate the program.

Specializing in energy-efficient homes priced under \$200,000, Ideal Homes has been racking up a long list of industry firsts for nearly two decades. Among other notable achievements, this list includes being the first builder recognized by the EPA as a "5-Star" Energy Builder for Homes Under \$150,000 (in 1997), and being the first in the U.S. to build a "Zero Energy Home" priced under \$200,000.

Today, Ideal Homes is making residential building history again by delivering geothermal heated and cooled homes at first-time buyer prices, exploding the fast-held belief that only the wealthy can afford high-efficiency technology in their homes. Not only is geothermal provided as an option for every Ideal Homes residential product, it is a standard feature in two Ideal

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Home neighborhoods, Somers Point and The Springs at Settlers Ridge, both located in the Oklahoma City metro area.

With more than 7,000 houses under its belt, Ideal Homes has learned a thing or two about building houses with a lower operating cost. Perhaps more importantly, the company has also learned how to sell lower operating cost as a value-added feature in their homes. While some builders insist homeowners are only “buying the box” and can’t sit still for conversations about energy efficiency, Ideal Homes is once again proving the “impossible” can be done by having those conversations directly translate to purchases. In fact, the company closed on approximately 350 geothermal homes in 2013 and expects to close on even more in 2014.

“Energy efficiency has kind of been our forte,” said Steve Shoemaker, director of marketing for Ideal Homes. “It’s pretty easy to sell high efficiency features in high-end homes. What separates Ideal Homes is the energy efficiency we bring to first-time buyers.”

Taking ground loop costs out of equation

According to Shoemaker, Ideal Homes determined a long time ago that energy savings really resonates with homebuyers.



Todd Taylor and his wife, Darise, are glad they purchased geothermal for their new home.

“No matter what your leanings are environmentally, everybody loves saving money,” Shoemaker said. “When someone walks through our doors, one of the first things we try to talk about is cost of ownership. We remind them that in addition to a mortgage payment, they also have to pay to operate that home. So when someone tells us that they can buy a home of the same square footage that is \$10,000 less, we’re able to show them that if they look at the total cost of ownership, our homes are actually a better value.”

Such conversations work well when discussing better windows and insulation, but higher ticket upgrades like geothermal have remained a tough sell because of the upfront expense of the loop field. However, thanks to a unique partnership between Ideal Homes and Caddo Electric Cooperative, the local utility company, homebuyers in two neighborhoods near Oklahoma City are getting all the benefits of geothermal without having to bear the upfront cost of the loop fields.

Caddo has developed a program allowing homeowners to forego costs associated with ground loop installation and maintenance in exchange for payment of a monthly thermal energy fee. Caddo assumes responsibility for installing and maintaining the geothermal ground loop system through this program, and charges a permanently fixed monthly fee (\$15 to \$24 per month on average) to the homeowner for its use. The fee is offset several times over by virtue of the energy savings, as well as by Caddo’s lowest electrical rate, which the utility grants to residences with

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geothermal systems. The program, which kicked off in the summer of 2012, is available to all homeowners in the Caddo Electric coverage area.

ClimateMaster and the company's builder development manager Titian Burris worked for several years with both Caddo Electric and Ideal Homes to help facilitate the program.

"This was a great opportunity for two entities highly committed to growing the residential geothermal market to overcome any upfront challenges by combining efforts and really make it happen," said Burris.

Now, instead of having to "sell" geothermal, geothermal helps sell Ideal Homes properties, especially in Somers Point and The Springs at Settlers Ridge, where geothermal is a standard feature.

Program sells itself

Todd Taylor and his wife, Darise, purchased their home at The Springs at Settlers Ridge in January 2013. Finding a builder that could provide an energy-efficient home was a high priority for the couple and they liked the neighborhood and low-maintenance patio home options at Settlers Ridge. It was serendipitous that the Caddo Electric program just happened to coincide with their decision to buy a new home.

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When Ideal Homes told them that they could have geothermal heating and cooling as a standard option on their home, Taylor checked out the technology through several channels. The deeper he looked, the more convinced he became that choosing a home with geothermal was indeed a smart decision, particularly given the Caddo Electric program.

"I discussed it with several friends that I have in the heating and air business," said Taylor. "They all said the same thing – I'd be an idiot not to take advantage of the opportunity."

Now, after living in his new geothermal heated and cooled home, Taylor is even more convinced that he and his wife made the right decision. Not only are they enjoying utility bills that are at least \$100 less per month than what they experienced in a similarly sized previous home, they have come to realize geothermal really was the ideal choice for their current property.

The home they chose has a small, low-maintenance backyard — no more than 10 yards deep. The last thing Taylor wanted was to have a loud condensing unit taking up precious outdoor space. Instead, the geothermal heat pump that is located in their attic is not only out of the way, it is so quiet that the Taylors hardly notice when it is on.

Taylor is just as pleased with his experience working with Ideal Homes — a company that he likens to a "well-oiled machine."

"I was very impressed with Ideal Homes through every step of the whole transaction. I really can't say enough good things about the experience," said Taylor.

Taylor isn't alone in his sentiments toward Ideal Homes, or his good fortune at having purchased in a neighborhood offering such high-end technology as a standard feature. Sonya McFee, who purchased a home in Somers Point, is equally delighted with her choice.

"Caddo County Electric and Ideal Homes are truly ahead of the game in making geothermal accessible for the average homeowner," said McFee. "Taking upfront costs and logistics out of the mix, they've enabled people like me to take advantage of the significant savings a geothermal home can offer. I'm excited to no longer have to worry about the thermostat during the hot summer months in Oklahoma, and also to have an HVAC system that operates so comfortably and quietly. This program really sells itself, and I'm proud to be on the 'pioneering' end as an Ideal Homes geothermal-standard homeowner."

In 2014, Ideal Homes expects to sell 3